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Silver Cigarette Case by the Moscow Art Jewelry Workshop (ХАЮС), circa late 1920s - early 1930s.

Measures 88 mm x 116 mm x 19 mm; weighs 205 g (including the elastic straps for the cigarettes). Red cabochon thumb piece of polished glass. The artwork in high 3-d profile is quite uncommon: it includes a flag on a tall flagpole adorned with a wreath and topped by a five-sided star. The flag has what resembles the Soviet national emblem of the early type used from 1923 - 1936. It is however highly stylized and schematic with some elements omitted or transformed - which leads us to believe that the cigarette case is of a very early vintage, possibly made in the late 1920s and almost certainly not later than in the early 30s. The depiction of Soviet national symbols became strictly controlled and enforced starting from in the early 30s, so it is practically unimaginable that such an artistic freedom in the use of the coat of arms of the USSR would be allowed later on. Beside that, the artwork has a distinct early flair that was largely supplanted during the 30s by the pompous and rigid Stalinist Empire style.

The interior of the panels is gilded. Both sides show a silver hallmark "875" with a worker's head, the kind used from 1927-1954. Next to each of the silver hallmarks is the maker mark ХАЮС ("KhAYuS") of the Art Jewelry Workshop, a highly regarded Moscow manufacturer of luxury items. This maker operated as a separate enterprise until 1967, at which point it was absorbed into a much larger Moscow Jewelry Factory (МЮЗ).

The front has a presentation engraving in Russian that reads: "On the Day of the 5th Jubilee for exemplary work". To an untrained eye, this may appear to be the entire sentence. A careful close-up examination under a bright light reveals however that there was once two other lines that were carefully erased with hardly a trace remaining. We can only guess as to the reason for the reduction, but considering the time when the cigarette case was presented, it seems very likely that the removed words contained something that was later deemed "politically incorrect". The mid- to late-1930s was a period of unprecedented purges of the Soviet military and political elites. An arrest of the former industrial manager, high-ranking military or NKVD officer, or high-profile party apparatchik would mean that his name would have to be literally erased from memory. Thus, any mention of the hapless individual - now deemed an "enemy of the people" - would be eradicated, be it in publicly available literature, documents, or even a presentation engraving. Curiously, remnants of the letters comprising the erased lines on the cigarette cases are still visible, so it may be entirely possible to figure out what those lines say using modern forensic methods (such methods currently do exist, and are used for example by police to figure out the erased VIN numbers on stolen vehicles.) This may be a tantalizing opportunity for the new owner of the case!

Beside the partly erased presentation, the cigarette case is in excellent condition. The artwork is well-preserved, having all of its sculptured details perfectly defined. There are only a few minuscule scratches, mostly to the back panel, all of them barely noticeable and not detractive in the least. The case is completely free of dents or significant dings. The cabochon closure button functions smoothly; the hinge is intact; the alignment of the two panels is perfect. The gilt finish on the interior is pale but clearly visible. The retaining strips for the cigarettes are a replacement although they show age and use (please note, the cigarettes of the popular Soviet Belomor Canal brand in our photo are for illustration purposes only and not included with the case.)

This is a very uncommon cigarette case with a story to tell. In addition to its rarity and artistic value, it has a great potential for future research.

Item# 40708

\$875.00

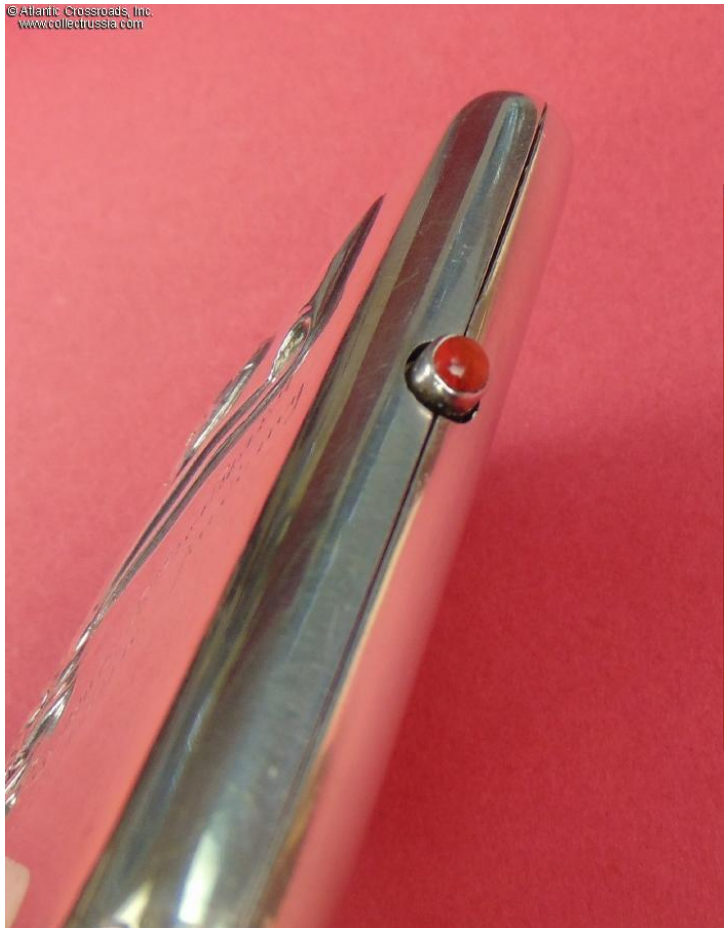


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